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Fort Témiscamingue

Study of the potential use of the collection of archaeological artifacts

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the archaeological artifacts from Fort Témiscamingue from a site development viewpoint focussed on the two major themes of interpretation. The condition of the collection, which is comprised largely of highly fragmented objects, is described and the date of the collection, which contains objects deposited during the occupation of the site as a trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company (1840-1902) and more recent objects deposited in the 20th century, is dated. Objects that reflect certain aspects of the occupation of Fort Témiscamingue are then identified as a function of the interpretation themes and subthemes. Finally, the author makes two recommendations directly related to site development.

Introduction

A large number of artifacts were uncovered in the archaeological excavations carried out in 1971 at Fort Témiscamingue. The study of the potential use of the collection describes these artifacts and their use from a site development perspective. It takes into account the two main themes of site interpretation: (1) the role of the Témiscamingue trading post in the fur trade network and (2) the activities at the Témiscamingue post.

The study deals with four areas. First, it outlines the general condition of the collection, an important aspect that must be well known from the outset. Second, it describes the dating of the collection in terms of the period of occupation of the trading post. The role of the various groups of artifacts in the understanding and interpretation of the site is then discussed. Finally, recommendations are made.

This study follows a complete inventory of the artifacts found at Fort Témiscamingue located in the laboratories at Harbour Station in Quebec City in July 1987. Research was also conducted on a number of objects which posed problems, complementing the results presented in the following pages.

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Condition of the collection

The quantity of archaeological artifacts from Fort Témiscamingue is considerable. In Quebec City, the largest part of the collection was stored in 47 crates measuring 16 in. x 12.5 x 10 (1.2 cubic ft.). In addition, there are more than 1500 fragments of other objects, such as table utensils and an entire collection of pipes, which are still in Ottawa and which we should receive shortly. Consequently, specific data on them is not included in this study.

With respect to the collection kept in Quebec City, 24 982 artifacts were inventoried. The number of artifacts found varies significantly from one section of the site to another. In the area where the two magazines were located, 17 941 partially burned artifacts were found, accounting for 71.82 percent of the total. The house of the head of the trading post ranks second, with 3550 artifacts or 14.21 percent of the total number. Elsewhere on the site, the number of artifacts ranges from five to 1005, a relatively low percentage.

In conducting the inventory of the artifacts, the researchers soon discovered that the collection was highly fragmented, particularly objects made of fragile materials such as ceramic and glass. In addition, most of the objects appear to be incomplete, that is not all of the parts have been found. Metal objects, which are more resistant to breakage, are in slightly better condition, except for those made of tinplate and sheet iron, thin materials which were easily deteriorated by rust.

By gluing the pieces of significant objects back together and completing, where necessary, their shape using moulding techniques, we should be able to produce several whole objects as well as a number of items that could be used for an exhibit. This moulding technique has already been used successfully for objects currently on display at the house of the blast-furnace keeper of the Forges du Saint-Maurice. Other development techniques could be used, such as associating a fragment of an object with a photograph of an entire identical object.

Dating of the collection

The dating of an archaeological collection is based on certain categories of artifacts. Ceramic objects are made of various materials, the evolution of which is known. Therefore, they are datable. Glass objects, particularly containers, show traces of their manufacturing technique; the periods during which these techniques were used are also known. Clay pipes are often very useful, depending on their style and markings. Finally, other objects, such as coins stamped with the year of minting, can also facilitate dating.

On the basis of the inventory of the objects found at Fort Témiscamingue, it is possible to affirm that datable artifacts were found consistently from one location to the next at the site. Moreover, since there is seldom more than one archaeological layer, preventing the distinction of later or earlier assemblages, the collection will be dated, at this stage, as a single association. The ceramic and glass objects will be used for dating, since the pipes could not be inventoried and other categories of objects were virtually non-existent.

The ceramic objects in the collection are made primarily of fine white earthenware, vitrified fine white earthenware, coarse sandstone with a feldspathic glaze, European and late Oriental hard paste porcelain and English bone china. The dates of all of these materials range from 1840 to 1930-1940. The markings on several objects confirm these dates. The virtual lack of creamware or pearlware (a few sherds at most), materials commonly used in the first half of the 19th century, corroborate the earliest date of 1840.

The shapes and manufacturing techniques of the glass objects confirm the dates obtained using the ceramic objects. Several of the glass items were made by machine, a process used increasingly beginning in the 1890s. A relatively large number of other containers bear the markings of the Consumers Glass and Dominion Glass companies. Such markings were placed on the surface of the bottles beginning in 1920 and 1928 respectively.

With respect to the dates of occupation of Fort Témiscamingue, which range from 1764 and earlier to 1902, the dating of the collection raises two important points. First, objects in the collection which date later than 1902 and which are not directly related to the operation of the trading post should be set

aside. Second, the archaeological objects reveal only part of the activities that took place at the site, that is from 1840 to 1902.

Significance of artifacts

The artifacts and archaeological objects dating from 1840 to 1902 should increase our knowledge of certain aspects of Fort Témiscamingue as a trading post. The preliminary data on the objects will be presented as a function of two major themes of site interpretation and their subthemes.

The first theme is: the role of the Témiscamingue trading post in the fur trade network. It has several subthemes. The objects in the collection are related to several of these subthemes.

After study, a number of axe heads from the collection could be identified as traded items and could therefore associated with the subtheme *articles traded* (Figure 1). Parts of traps, more specifically typical springs, would also be included in this subtheme.

The only object which indicates the presence of *Indians* — another subtheme — is a tinkling cone, a small one-inch cylindrical ornament made of copper alloy, which was once shiny. The Indians wore several of these ornaments on their clothing.

Various pieces of ceramic, such as the plate shown in Figure 2, have a very interesting marking which is related to another subtheme, the various individuals or groups at Témiscamingue. This marking is the emblem of the Hudson's Bay Company, to which the fort belonged from 1821 to the early 20th century.

The second theme is: the activities of the fort. This theme too has several subthemes. Many objects are related to these subthemes.

Hardware used for the construction and repair of buildings often provide valuable information on the techniques used at the time. The collection contains a large variety of sliding bolts, latch bars, door locks and other pieces of hardware (Figure 3). They would be associated with the first subtheme, *lodgings and physical organization.*

There are few objects that are directly related to the *workers at the trading post*, a second subtheme, or to their activities. A ceramic inkwell and two glass inkwells evoke the many written documents, reports and inventories done by the head and clerk of the trading post (Figure 4). The majority of tools found are associated with the activities of the blacksmith, who made the objects necessary for the operation of the post and the fur trade at the site (Figure 5). The blacksmith undoubtedly shod the horses of the post (Figure 5). A currycomb used primarily for cleaning the hide of horses and a blade, a type of veterinary spear for bleeding horses (Figure 6) may also have been used by him. Although the shops of the joiner and canoe-maker were excavated in 1971, no objects have yet been offically associated with their activities.

The collection contains no objects that are directly related to the presence of *missionaries at the site*, the third subtheme. However, there is a very small fragment of a rosary, the only remains of a religious object that could have been owned by Catholics.

Household objects are by far the most numerous in the collection. They could be used to document and illustrate the fourth subtheme: *day-to-day* life. In conducting the inventory, the researchers observed that a high proportion of household objects came from the house of the head of the trading post and that the objects found elsewhere, in smaller numbers, were virtually identical, producing a certain degree of homogeneity. These objects include tableware, such as plates, dishes and cups; utensils; and containers and bottles for food and drinks (Figure 7). Hygiene and medication are also represented: bowls, water jugs, chamber pots, jars for ointments and bottles for perfume and medication (Figure 8). There are very few personal objects, such as fastenings for clothing (buttons and buckles) or jewellery. White clay pipes and two jews'-harps reflect relaxation and leisure activities. Several fragments of dolls and small toys reveal the presence of children and their toys (Figure 9). The thimbles are the only objects related to the manufacture and repair of linen and clothes. Many fragments of oil lamps attest to the use of this method of lighting. Finally, several pieces of metal are associated with furnishings.

Objects discovered in the magazines and elsewhere on the site can be associated with the last subtheme, *provisions at the Témiscamingue post.* The large iron axes in the collection were likely used for chopping wood needed for heating the various buildings, houses, shops and magazines and for cooking. The jars and jugs found in the magazines likely contained some of the foodstuffs and other staples used at the fort and traded with the outside world (Figure 10). Other types of objects could be added after a detailed study of the mass of burned fragments found in one of the magazines is conducted.

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Fig. 1 - Axe heads (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 2 - Plate with the emblem of the Hudson's Bay Company (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 3 - Architectural hardware (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 4 - Ceramic and glass inkwells (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 5 - Blacksmith's tools and horseshoes (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 6 - Copper alloy and iron currycomb and blade (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

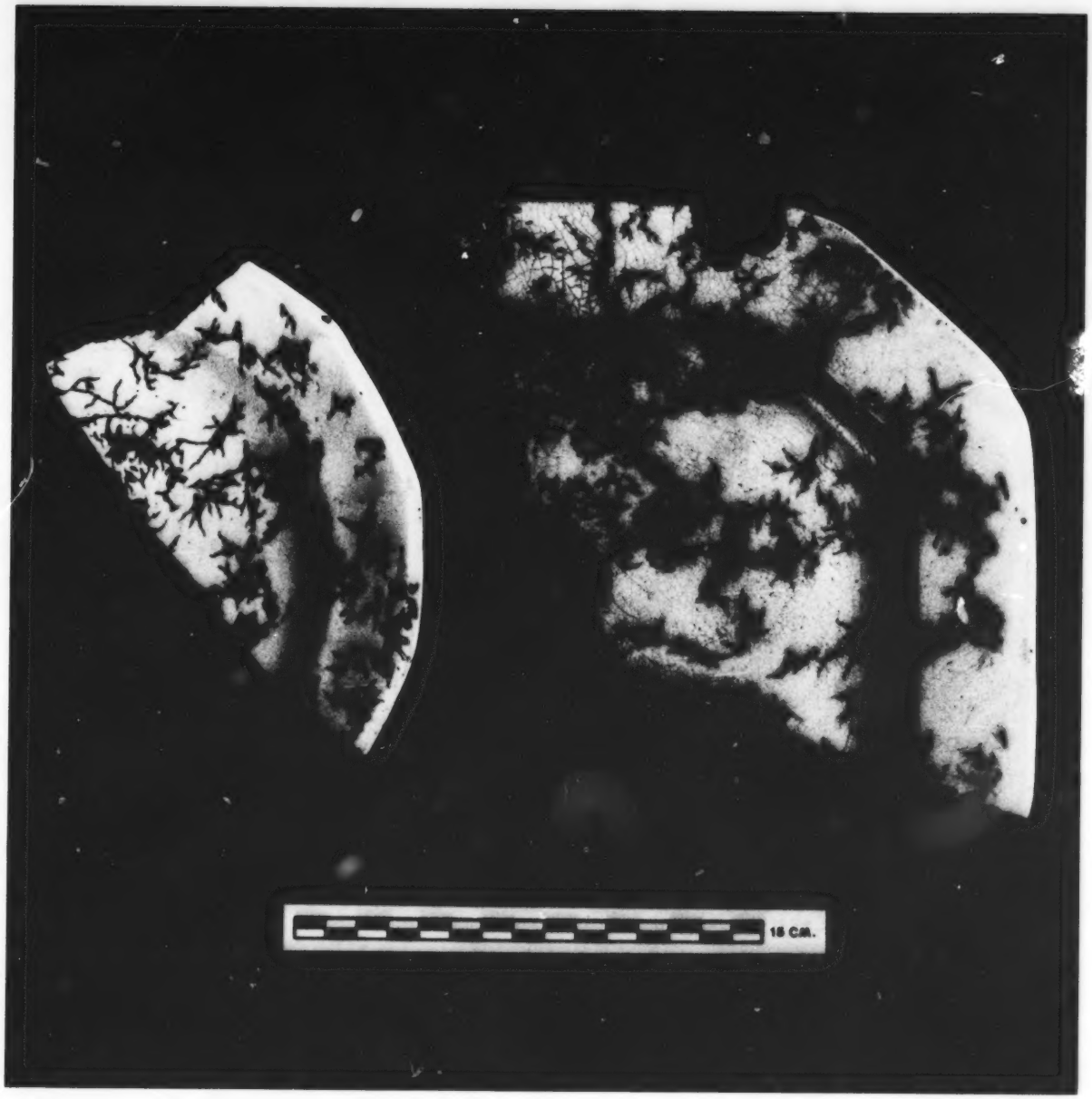

Fig. 7 - Dish and plate with speckled pattern (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

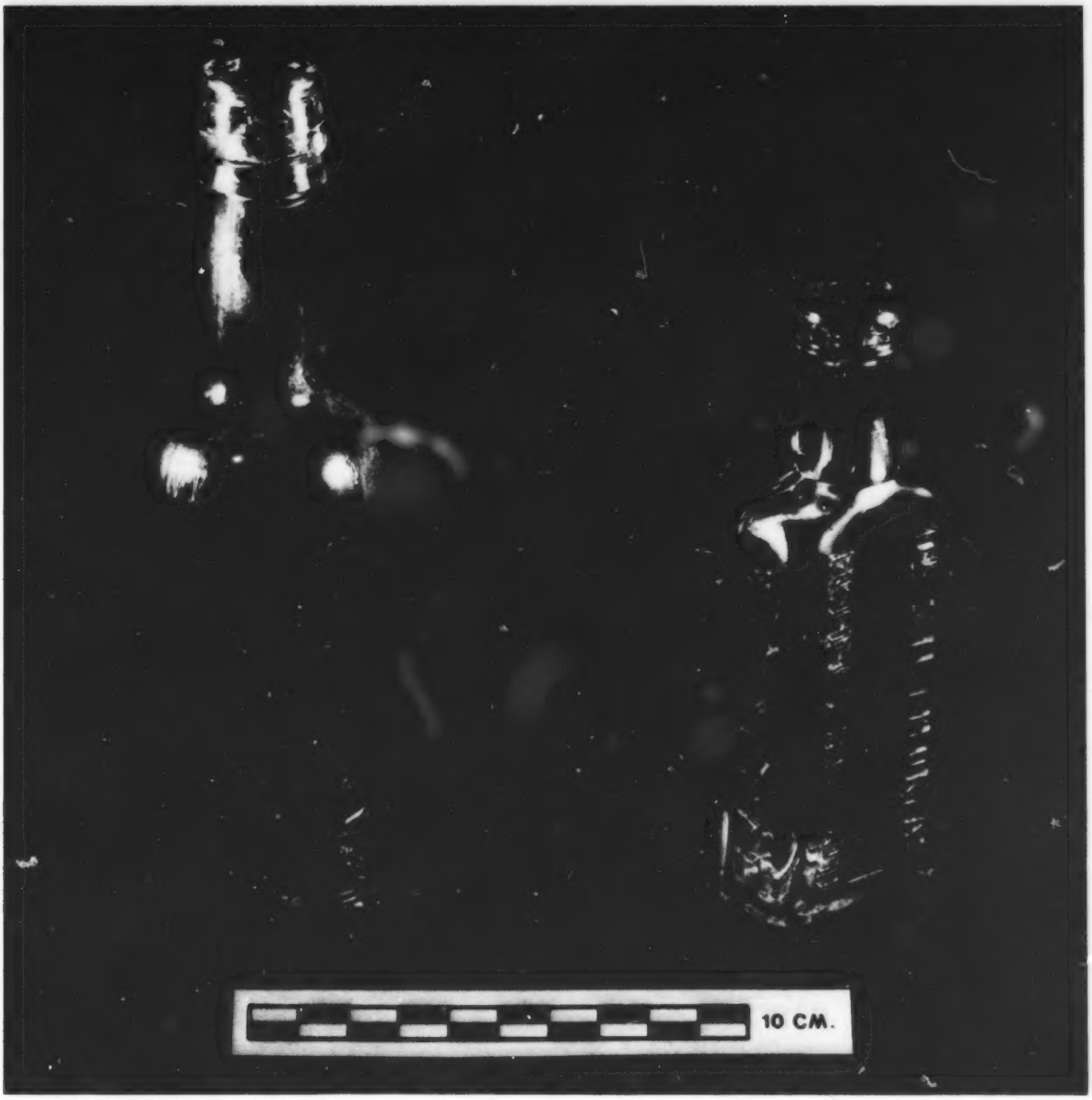

Fig. 8 - Bottles for Worcestershire sauce and medicinal oil (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 9 - Small water pitcher belonging to child's toy set (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Fig. 10 - Sandstone jar (*Photo: Jean Jolin*)

Recommendations

During this study, it was established that some of the artifacts and archaeological objects date from 1840 to 1902, the year in which the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned the fort, and that the rest of the collection was deposited later than this. It was also observed that the objects, few of which are intact, reflect certain aspects of the occupation of the site. The study revealed that part of the collection could increase our the knowledge of Fort Témiscamingue and facilitate site development, which has led us to make two recommendations.

No. 1: Conduct a material culture study of the Fort Témiscamingue collection

The objectives of this study, conducted by a specialist, would be: (1) to piece the objects together, either entirely or partially; (2) to identify all objects belonging to the period of occupation of the fort; (3) to document and analyse the objects to determine their use and significance; (4) to explain the absence of objects usually found at trading post sites; and (5) to designate significant objects for exhibit purposes.

No. 2: Use the archaeological objects for site interpretation and development

A limited number of the objects are associated with several of the subthemes of site interpretation. In some cases, it will be necessary to complete the shape of the objects using the previously mentioned techniques. The advantage of these objects is that they are authentic because they were found at the fort itself, which generally stimulates visitor interest. In addition, the selection of archaeological objects will meet the demand of the residents of the region who would like to see what has been found in the excavations. The objects could be placed in well-protected glass display cases or used to illustrate the explanatory plaques placed at the site. The material culture researcher could suggest additional innovative ways of using the objects for site development.

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